VASILE VOICULESCU. ORTHODOXISM AND TRADITIONALISM

The poetry of Vasile Voiculescu rises, starting with the volume *Pârgă* (1921) to its own horizon, to its authentic accents, as previous volumes might be placed under the sign of stylistic quest, expressive exercise and discipleship. Indeed, if *Poezii* (Poems) (1916), his debut book, transcribed indiscriminately and without scrupulousness themes of traditionalist lineage, and was unable to give the author a very distinct voice (echoes of Coşbuc, Cerna or Vlahuţă can be distinguished with disturbing clarity) and the booklet of patriotic poems *Din Ţara Zimbrului* gave relief -- in an external too discursive manner – to feelings of great ethical "height" and perhaps therefore hardly treatable with the frail pen of poetry without fully assuming them innerly, with the volume *Pârgă* V. Voiculescu gains originality and expressiveness. Now he develops specific favorite themes, individualizing topoi, he decants an unmistakable style that melts in itself a symbolism apart treated in a slightly didactic manner, a descriptive verve and a specific grace that render lyrical images hieratic. If with Cerna or Vlahuţă ideas produced the impression of foreign, unassimilated bodies in relation to the poetic discourse that sheltered them, of a disproportionate and impermissible independence, with Vasile Voiculescu idea is totally absorbed in speech, dissolved in lyricism, through the most varied and multiple artistic techniques, especially with the help of allegories which translate the ideal, rarefied by its very nature, into the terms of the real. Speech is thus "getting thicker," ideas acquire amplitude and determinations, the vague precipitates in distillation devices of lyricism. Just a few examples are sufficient to document the wide and varied range of allegories. Thus, the poet feels he is a diamond that is being washed by the Lord’s hand in the waters of eternity (image of a superb plasticity that translates human fragility and beauty, the auroral human presence); he also feels a fiddle handled by the hand of God on a violin, a cup molded by the great Craftsman. Some other times, the poet’s thought is on watch, like a sailor encountering "large islands of ideals" and pain is for him a rock hiding veins of gold, etc.

Regarding the lexis of this poem, it has poignancy and grip on its object, the poet eludes the rules of formal refinement, of conventional

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artifice, just in order to give the reader the most acute sense of concreteness and the impression of liveness. Harsh, unrefined, succulent words appear to address the sense of taste more than aesthetic perception; these are words violating the sensitivity of a reader with predilection for languorous, effeminate poetry. This is a vocabulary that has no aesthetic tradition, words are poetically unconsecrated, anonymous, used by the poet to undermine, restructure and render convention functional again; these are words whose expressive force was not diluted by excessive lyrical exploitation. As G. Calinescu emphasizes, with Vasile Voiculescu "poetry begins with the word. Each word has a lyrical sound. This poetry would lead us to Arghezi's right words that are also chosen according to their karat. But there, poetry only springs out of matching words. Mr. Voiculescu's words have a must of their own, have flesh, density, they are themselves an objectification of states." The word thus retains an elementary force, it has weight and power of suggestion, it is itself a reality that offers itself to perception, translating just that will to materialize, to figure and shape the poetic 'idea' out of the paste of the phenomenal. In a poem of the volume *Destin*, the poet points out, with a remarkable willingness to visualize and render concrete, the nature and purpose of words, of course, all through an allegory: "De-acolo din pajiştea de aur a durerii,/ Unde gândurile pasc în turme neştiute/ Smulse din florile tainei şi iarba tăcerii,/ Coboară cuvintele, negre mieluşele mute (…)" etc.

A suggestive poem entitled *Poezia* (Poetry) contains the ethical rhetorism of an ars poetica; it represents in a symbolic way the act of lyrical creation, the lyrical self feeling keenly, almost tragically, the consciousness of poetic convention, of the "farce" that any staging of the words eventually is:: "M-am băgat surugiu la cuvinte/ Le momesc cu văpăi, le hrănesc cu jăratec,/ Le strunesc în ham de gând, când lin, când sălbatec,/ Le-ncing cu harapnicul dorului şi mână 'nainte!// Ca să nu zboare la cer ca puricii din basm, pripite,/ Mă plec la fiecare, migălos faur/ Şi-ncalţ agerile versuri la copite/ Cu potcoavele rimelor de aur/ (…)Loc, loc!/ Rădvanul coboară pe pământ,/ Dar aci se destramă crăiasa de imagini,/ Amuţesc, speriaţi zurgălăii de rime-n vânt,/ Chingile se rup, caii răzvrătiţi, cuvânt de cuvânt./ strâng aripile şi fug înapoi pe paragini,/ Rămân, negre, dârele roţilor pe albele pagini". The poet has, not infrequently, a very strong awareness of his condition as craftsman ("faur") that tames the élan of words, but also an intuition, not less clear, of the insufficiency of these

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imperfect poetic instruments, simple "black streaks" of the ecstasy of imagination, inconclusive reminiscences of the inner adventures of sensitivity. Voiculescu perceives with unexpected intensity the drama of language which is unable to represent reality without flaw, integrally, with its many-sided facets, as it lucidly records the subtle relationship between expressed and unexpressed, between nameable and unnamable. On the other hand, Voiculescu's poetry proves to be one that relies very much on visuality, on chromatic reflexes, on perspective games, fact again indicating his will for concreteness, for sensual ecstasy, for empathic contact with poetically circumscribed objects, as well as a more pantheistic than theistic view of the world. Images, outlined in thick strokes, having autonomy and concreteness, do not exclude, however, as noted, the stylized filigree of details processed with refinement, as in the pastel *Seară întârziată*, a poem that has, in the words of G. Calinescu, the allure of an "initiation into cosmos "Din umbra ce-şi vărsase mireasma ei jilavă/ Un brad bătrân şi pustnic privea cum, sus, stingher,/ Urcând către lumina ce se-nchidea în slavă/ Cu largi rotiri un vultur se-nşuruba în cer./ A-nvineţit deodată văzduhul tot. Din partea/ Uitatei nopţi un crainic împrăştia fiori./ Urcat pe-un munte galben şi-aidoma cu moartea/ Cosea pe zări amurgul livezi de roşii flori". In another train of thought, the primary spring of Voiculescu's poetry proves to be one of a dual nature. We deal, on the one hand, with an evocative dominant (in poems that depict pictures, places, therefore in pastels) and, on the other hand, we deal with a summoning dominant, adopted mainly in religious-inspired poems. Moreover, religious themes massively feed Voiculescu's lyricism with a unique stamp whose charm is provided by a mixture of stylized grace and dense stroke, of heavy materiality and botticellian hieratism. These themes (Nativity, Presentation of the Magi, Jesus' death) are allegorically treated and give identity to Voiculescu's orthodoxy which predates, as is well known, the gandirist movement. An image of a very significant prestige is that of the *angel* that is, as Calinescu writes, decorative convention "not without lyrical effluvia (...), but its meaning is graceful, and calligraphy resembles primitive painting".

Particularly suggestive for the avatars of this image in Voiculescu's poetry may be the poem *L-am lăsat de-am trecut*, showing a clear influence from Arghezi: "L-am cunoscut de cum l-am zărit, /Trimis înadins de soartă,/ Mi-a trecut pe la poartă/ Şi nu s-a oprit./ Era cu părul ca aurora/

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Aripile, cu pene de lumină,/ Lânced le târa la picioarele tuturora,/ Prin pulbere şi tină". The impression that emerges from these verses is rather one of desacralization by visualizing the smallest details, the supernatural being, this time, inserted in the natural, terrestrial order of being. Integrated into common order, dealt with in terms of natural-unnatural, making itself visible to the profane and profaning eyes, detailing the miracle, description of what can not be described, the appearance of Voiculescu's angel has something of the fate of Marquez's angel in the famous story. Is this poem, a foreshadowing, and all the more significant, of the fantastic of Voiculescu's posthumous prose? Another dimension that structures Vasile Voiculescu's poetry is the moral one. The ethical turn, manifest or implicit, imposes itself on the reader's perception or intuition; as he or she can not miss a touch of light didacticism that sometimes jeopardizes the aesthetic effect. Ethical eloquence, the iconography often stylized with remarkable finesse, Biblical characters, the idyllic or the evocation of Romanian mythology are just some of the features of Voiculescu's poetry before 1944, which were, if not ignored altogether, then at least neglected; they give Voiculescu's work such a peculiar physiognomy. Here one must look, in fact, for latencies, for resources that will be fully revealed with the publication of *Sonete închipuite…*, of fantastic stories and of *Zahei orbul*; this is the hidden face of a protean personality of unquestionable value.

Voiculescian lyricism captures our interest today, in two more important aspects: firstly, the force of poetic flow, a lyrical emanation of a nature that is not only robust, but also profound, that turns into lyricism all things and beings that offers themselves to inner eye of the poet; secondly, Voiculescu captures us due to the grace of detail, through the minute, craftsman's calligraphy of the relief of things, through the gentle suggestion of their intimacy that is irreducible to external events, but translatable, through the latter, into privileged flashing moments. From these constant features, deemed irreconcilable until we perceive their complementarity - authentic and verifiable – Voiculescu's poetry arises at its most original. The similarities that can be noted between this poetry and e art of icons on glass, a blend of robust representation and metaphysical thrill, uncensored emanation of telluric force goals and exorcising styling of things. In its broad lines, Voiculescu's poetry betrays a quiet evolution without expressive earthquakes likely to alter its course that seems predetermined by implacable authorial intentions set, one might say, once

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and for all, with quasi-demiurgical precision. It is also not difficult to establish an ascendancy in the philosophical poetry practiced, of course, without much aesthetical success, by Vlahuţă or Panait Cerna. There is, however, a clear difference Voiculescu's poetry that gives it a special place within the confines of the so-called "philosophical poetry." If Cerna or Vlahuţă insert concept in a poem *tale quale*, without a proper prior lyrical processing, without any extras designed to give artistic vitality and viability, allowing lyricism to succumb to the conceptual weight it is compelled to support, Voiculescu, on the other hand, "thinks through allegory, through parable and apologue; with them, he increases the old treasure of sacred books and mystical traditions" (Tudor Vianu).

Again, in the poem *Târziu*, Voiculescu brings, somehow, through allegory, Plato's ideas from their skies into the sensible world, instilling them life, molding them from the dense, rough paste of the concrete. What singles out his poetry, ridding it of the specter of stereotyping, of sterile repetition of predetermined schemes, is precisely variety, the exuberant diversity of allegories, as well as the extreme plasticity of parables, designed to get ideas closer, to lower their magnitude, their degree of abstraction, to the benefit of the lyrical suggestion able to capture the intimate thrill of things. The poem *Târziu* is representative of how Voiculescu conceives and perceives the poetic act as transfiguration of the world, through allegory, but also as encapsulation, in the body of the poem of defining symbols for his own condition. Here is a quite striking opposition between "deed" and "dream". The deed is regarded as insufficient actualization of the ideal, of the dream or rather as a camouflage of the deeper self behind gestures, behind external facts lacking any gnosiological relief and ontic poignancy. If the dream is seen as an inexhaustible range of virtualities, of latencies sufficient to themselves, the deed is merely an expression of a possibility, it is, perhaps, a failure of the dream that the being keeps encapsulating in itself, a dream of infinity, a continuous aspiration towards other horizons, towards the absolute: "Ţi-ascunzi în faptă viciul ca un junghier în teacă,/ Lăuntricele steme le stingi şi pleci stingher./ Nu te-ar opri nici ape, nici vântul tot şi, iacă,/ Nici alba profeţie a Zorilor în cer". Compared with the hopes and dreams of the poet, death comes as a counterweight, as necessary antinomy. To the open horizon corresponds the closure of the being in death. One needs to underline the fact that death has no negative connotations, it is valued as a

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"longing for death," as aspiration towards extinction, as attraction of the nirvana in the spirit of Eminescu, to a certain extent: “Ca o albină-n câmpul cu firele răscoapte,/ Tu caţi prisaca Morţii: când brumele s-aştern,/ Să intri ca-ntr-un fagure de linişte şi noapte,/ Flămând de neagra miere a somnului etern”. *Târziu* is a poem of existential contrasts, of the interiorization and exteriorization of a lyric I attracted by both the absolute and everyday life, by the world of deed and that of the dream.

One of the most important creations of Vasile Voiculescu, *În grădina Ghetsimani*, is part of the volume *Pârgă* (1921) and is a poem of religious inspiration. The poem has as its starting point an episode from the Bible, occurring in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus addressed God begging him to give him the strength to endure the sufferings that he will be submitted to. After this prayer, Jesus will be greeted by Judas who, by kissing him, betrays him, resulting in his arrest and humiliation. This is the Christ fable from which Vasile Voiculescu started and to which he gave symbolic and allegorical meanings. Obviously, in the poem narrative elements are few, and are placed under the sign of essentialization and suggestion. The poet is concerned, in his work, with shaping the figure of the exemplary hero, of Jesus, while highlighting the turmoil of his soul. Christic sacrifices are all initiation steps that will culminate in death on the cross. The poet highlights not only the Garden of Gethsemane episode, but in order to give more dramatism, more tragic force to his verse, he achieves a synthesis of several biblical episodes: the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the crucifixion and the torment endured then, the rendering of the landscape transfigured by the tragic colors of the sacrifice of the exemplary hero. It is obvious that the poem's semantic axis is represented by the revelation of Jesus' dual nature: a human one, subject to precariousness and to the tribulations of the body and a divine one, which allows him access to the universe of sacredness. The first stanza of the poem, placed in a natural setting that is consistent with the intense feelings of the lyrical hero, suggests precisely this constitutive duality that makes the hero feel intense pain, but on the other hand, it makes him "fight" fate, seek to defeat his own human limits: “Isus lupta cu soarta şi nu primea paharul…/ Căzut pe brânci în iarbă, se-mpotrivea într-una./ Curgeau sudori de sânge pe chipu-i alb ca varul/ Şi-amarnica-i strigare stârnea în slăvi furtuna.// O mână ne-ndurată, ţinând grozava cupă,/ Se cobora-mbiindu-l şi i-o ducea la gură.../ Şi-o sete uriaşă sta sufletul să-i rupă…/ Dar nu voia s-

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atingă infama băutură". There are several lyrical syntagms in the poem, which are metaphor-laden and suggest precisely the dramatic confrontation of the two sides of the hero: the human and the divine. "Curgeau sudori de sânge", for example, highlights the unbearable suffering of the hero, his human nature, his sacrificial destiny and vocation that consecrate his stature, while another syntagm, such as "chipu-i alb ca varul" is a metaphoric and symbolic sign of purity and of the divine nature of Jesus.

In pictorial and statuary images, of particular poignancy of representation, Voiculescu stages the symbolic figure of a character with a messianic vocation, placed under the auspices of the sacred, a lyrical and mythical character that is in an extreme situation, at the crossroads of his sacrificial destiny. The dramatic conflict between body and spirit, between the avatars of the body and divine will ends with the triumph of the divine nature, which enhances the tragic greatness of the character ("În apa ei verzuie jucau sterlici de miere/ Şi sub veninul groaznic simţea că e dulceaţă…/ Dar fălcile-ncleştându-şi, cu ultima putere/ Bătându-se cu moartea, uitase de viaţă!". The last stanza circumscribes, with greater accuracy of detail, the natural setting of the drama transfigured by the poet. It is a background dominated by forebodings and the thrill of fate, a torn nature, a setting that gets tragic colors and vibrates at the sufferings of Jesus. Perhaps the "bătăile de aripi" passing "prin vraiştea grădinii" symbolize the same triumph of divine destiny, of the supra-terrestrial nature of Jesus: "Deasupra, fără tihnă, se frământau măslinii,/ Păreau că vor să fugă din loc, să nu-l mai vadă…/ Treceau bătăi de aripi prin vraiştea grădinii/ Şi uliii de seară dau roate după pradă". Poem of the sublimation of terrestrial condition into divine condition, *În grădina Ghetsimani* is one of the representative works of Vasile Voiculescu, through its thematic content, through its manner of stylistic configuration of that content and through an acute sensitivity to the field of the metaphysical.

Sonetele is Vasile Voiculescu's work of lyrical maturity, a work in which the refinement of expression blends with an indisputable depth of meaning. As noted by Mircea Tomuş, "in these sonnets not only our contemporary suffers and loves, but first and foremost Man, the eternal and omnipresent man, 'the archetypes without age or name,' evoked by the poet in that disturbing sonnet, that places him in Eminescu's sublime vicinity." *Sonetul CLXX* is a praise of the founding word with Orphic meanings, the word that stands apart from the vocable used in everyday communication.

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In the structure of the word coexist limit and limitlessness, meaning and sublimed referent, moment and eternity, latencies and actualizations ("Sămânţa nemuririi, iubite, e cuvântul,/ Eternul se ascunde sub coaja unei clipe,/ Ca-n oul ce păstrează un zbor înalt de-aripe,/ Pân' ce-i soseşte timpul în slăvi să-şi ia avântul"). The poetic word is also a revelation of the world's original dimensions, a mirroring, in a small sonorous space, of the boundlessness of the universe. This paradox is plastically rendered by the poet in the image of upward motion, of the flight to the heights ("în slăvi să-şi ia avântul"). But the word is also the one that incorporates in its fragile pattern human emotions of an overwhelming diversity. Love, hate, rebellion, nostalgia, suaveness and grotesque can all be found in the space of the poetic word, are designated by the vocable articulated in various modulations.

Love is a privileged theme of Voiculescu's sonnets. In this poem, love is poetically represented as an almost divine force that has the quality of pulling beings out of the ephemeral, out of their precarious condition, in order to restore them to their original, archetypal condition, to suggest an ideal world to them. Love causes the liberation of profound being from the prison of flesh, freedom from the narrow patterns of time and space and access to a paradisal place and a utopian time where the authentic identity of being and communion with the other may be found: "A fost de-ajuns un nume, al tău, sol dezrobirii,/ S-au spart şi veac, şi lume; ţinut prizonier/ A izbucnit în ţăndări, viu, vulturul iubirii,/ Cu ghearele-i de aur să ne răpească-n cer". "The magic keys" that human beings hold inside them are precisely those original models of knowledge and affection that God planted and through which human consciousness can rise to the contemplation of immutable, eternal and perfect Platonic Ideas. The final invocation of the poet deals with the aspiration towards perfection, the "pura-ntâietate" (pure origin) through which the being can retrieve its deep, divine roots, those originary reasons that it had forgotten aftre the "fall:" "Cine ne puse-n suflet aceste magici chei?/ Egali în frumuseţe şi-n genii de o seamă,/ Am descuiat tărâmul eternelor idei;/ Supremelor matriţe redaţi, care ne cheamă/ Din formele căderii, la pura-ntâietate,/ Să ne topim în alba, zeiasca voluptate". The word has, therefore, magical powers in Vasile Voiculescu's vision; it reflects, on the one hand, a contingent reality and, on the other, it transfigures it, it restores a degree of ideality to it, a hidden facet that can only be retrieved through a poetic "reading" of the world. The

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word has demiurgic features, it is purifying and founding logos, escape from the barren contours of knowledge and ascension to the archetypal reasons of mythical knowledge. Evocation of meanings more or less latent in the human being, the lyrical word is also invocation of the essences, designation of the world in terms of fictionality. Vasile Voiculescu's poetry stands out in the context of interwar and postwar literature through the allegorical vibration of meanings, through the parabolic expressivity of vision and, last but not least, the deep morality of the writer who no doubt, had an indisputable awareness of writing as a profession of faith and purifying, exorcising ritual.

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